

Approved  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**May 7, 2015**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Thursday, May 7, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Hemmann, Kotkin, Martino, Manousos, Rell, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Barry, and Chairperson Montinieri.

Absent: Councilor Hurley

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk.

Councilor Kotkin led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

**DELIBERATION ON THE PROPOSED 2015-2016 BUDGET**

Finance Director, Mike O'Neil gave a budget summary which included adjustments to the Town Manager's budget and their impact. The total amount of these changes is a reduction of \$31,596. Changes include: an increase in the workers compensation budget due to late change by workers compensation carrier, small adjustments up and down in the Town Manager's budgets, including reducing the printing and postage budget in the tax department. The server for Parks and Recreation IT budget and tablets in the Fire Marshal's budget are included in the Data Services budget. There is a \$12,000 reduction in the town-wide radio budget due to a maintenance contract for the new system. There is a \$10,000 increase in Data Services budget for a needed Google e-mail application. The reserve for retirees line is reduced by \$25,000, which will be paid out of the OPED trust and does not need to be included in the operating budget. Adjustments that net to \$4,210 for energy costs that affect the Fire Department budget.

Changes to the Board of Education budget include \$199,000 of reductions that were presented by the Board of Education last week. A retirement was announced earlier in the week representing a savings of \$39,011.

A change in the tax collection tax of current and delinquent taxes increased from 98.65 to 98.7%.

An increase of \$15,000 in the budgeted revenue from building permits after discussion on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

There was a reduction in the debt service of \$300,000 for interest payments on anticipated sale of \$15 million of new bonds in December 2016, which represents 6 months at 4%. This provision has been reduced to 4 months interest at 4.25%.

The net impact of all these changes is a net reduction in tax levy of \$357,563 which represents a 3.71 increase over the 2015 adopted budget and an increase of 1.45 mills.

Approved

Councilor Kotkin asked if the total mill rate of 38.38 an increase of 1.64 mills but with all the changes in Town Manager's budget we went down .01 of a mill to 38.37. Finance Director O'Neil answered no, it went down to 38.19 mills.

Councilor Martino asked if the CIP budget is as originally submitted, or if the dock funds that aren't needed were reallocated to the Fire Department's project this year. Town Manager Bridges answered that Kathy Bagley would like to keep the funds where they are until the dock construction is complete.

Councilor Kotkin asked how much of the increase was due to debt service. Mr. O'Neil stated that it is \$1,006,443 increase.

Councilor Kotkin asked that, excluding the debt service, it is a little less than a 2% increase in the budget. Mr. O'Neil stated that it is 2.46% increase without debt service (town only less debt service).

## DISCUSSION

Councilor Kotkin thanked the Council, the Board of Education for their work on the budget. Knew these would be a tough couple of years due to the increase in debt service cost for the high school. The Town staff worked hard to keep health care cost increases low. With little additional revenue from the State, the Council is mindful that all increases are coming from within the Town. There was minimal grand list increase of .25% and lower trash disposal costs were offset by higher MDC costs. Overall, this budget achieves a good balance the between tax payers' ability to pay and meeting the needs of the Town. He thanked Mike Emmett for keeping the Board of Education budget below 3% increase and thinks there will be enough money to implement the new math program in the schools.

Councilor Hemmann stated that we've had several difficult years and is concerned about peoples ability to pay. She has been stopped by people in town and struggles with it because she knows how hard the Council and Board of Education work to keep costs down. But after the meeting on Monday and the situation in Hartford along with an increase on the Town side it creates hardships for those on fixed income, so she cannot support all the motions. The State has not done a good job and now we are in a situation where there will be significant tax impact on all of us.

Deputy Mayor Barry stated that everyone recognizes the struggle of any increases. He is mindful of that, but we have to provide the services that townspeople expect and deserve; this budget achieves that balance. Everyone has worked hard to get this budget down to the bare bones; this is a good budget.

Approved

Councilor Manousos stated that doesn't think we've gotten to bare bones. Does not think we have funded the needs and prioritized the wants. Thinks we need to challenge people to do more with less and doesn't think we've done this.

Councilor Rell stated that the Council has heard from several people on fixed incomes and how the budget would affect them as well as emails from the public. Electric and MDC have gone up and with the proposed increases in Hartford it would amount to \$2.5 billion in additional taxes over the next 2 years. Senate Bill 1 will have a possible impact on taxpayers. The only way we can keep taxes down is to vote on a responsible budget.

Councilor Martino has also heard from the public and he is also on a fixed income. He has also sat in on all the budget workshops. We don't control the bonding that has gone up. He thinks that the departments are at bare bones and the only way around this is to cut services and he doesn't think we want to do that.

Chairperson Montinieri said he thinks the Council as a whole is of one mind and can agree that a lot of good work has been done. The portions of the budget that the Council can control are very small. He is hoping to see some improvement in the grand list. The budget is not perfect but it is responsible and fiscally sound.

Councilor Kotkin moved "THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 6, 2015 BE AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS" Seconded by Councilor Martino:

AMOUNT	ACCOUNT
INCREASE \$15,000	41203 – BUILDING DEPARTMENT

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 8-0-0

Councilor Kotkin moved "THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 6, 2015 BE AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: Seconded by Councilor Martino:

	AMOUNT	ACCOUNT
DECREASE	\$525	110 - TOWN COUNCIL
INCREASE	\$539	120 - TOWN MANAGER
INCREASE	\$7,376	140 - DATA SERVICES
DECREASE	\$1,009	150 - TOWN CLERK

Approved

DECREASE	\$ 4,263	220 - FINANCE
DECREASE	\$1,862	230 - TAX ASSESSOR
DECREASE	\$ 4,086	240 - TAX COLLECTOR
DECREASE\$	\$2,772	250 - CENTRAL OFFICE SERVICES
DECREASE	\$2,180	300 - PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
DECREASE	\$4,948	410 - BUILDING
DECREASE	\$57,720	420 - POLICE
DECREASE	\$12,000	430 - TOWNWIDE RADIO
DECREASE	\$3,734	440 - FIRE MARSHAL
DECREASE	\$4,210	450 - FIRE SUPPRESSION
DECREASE	\$4,980	510 - ENGINEERING
DECREASE	\$38,732	520 - PHYSICAL SERVICES
DECREASE	\$2,334	620 - SOCIAL & YOUTH SERVICES
DECREASE	\$14,788	800 - PARKS & RECREATION
DECREASE	\$87,500	920 - DEBT SERVICE
INCREASE	\$12,001	930 - INSURANCE
INCREASE	\$108,631	960 - RESERVE FOR RETIREES

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 8-0-0

Councilor Kotkin moved “THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 6, 2015 BE AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS TO DECREASE THE TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES BY \$238,467”  
Seconded by Councilor Martino.

Approved

Councilor Manousos asked how much of that decrease is due to retirements. Chairperson Montinieri answered that there were 3 total retirements that represent \$67,000 in savings.

Councilor Rell asked if there was discussion on combining services with the 2 departments. Chairperson Montinieri stated that he has asked Councilor Roberts, as chair of Shared Services, to begin discussion on that. Over the next several months Shared Services will meet to discuss it.

Councilor Manousos asked how much would that potentially save. Town Manager Bridges said it depends on how it is restructured and he and doesn't believe the positions are totally duplicated.

Chairperson Montinieri said that, at the State level, there will be incentives to build regional shared services within multiple communities.

Councilor Roberts stated that there have been multiple meetings of Shared Services Committee over the last year and a half. On July 1<sup>st</sup> set to merge the IT departments of the Town and Board. The committee has looked at other districts and is going forward. The HR/Finance position has been on the table for only a couple of weeks.

IT savings are not anticipated immediately but long term savings will be due to servers, hardware and software purchases, help desk allocations. Someone will be hire to fill the Town position to evaluate both networks to see if/when can combine. Two systems will not be supported in the future.

Councilor Manousos said that if we know it will generate savings let's make it happen, have been talking about it for 6 years.

Chairperson Montinieri stated that, for shared services to work, everyone needed to be on board philosophically and then can talk about the potential financial impact. Long term savings are anticipated by removing servers and moving to the cloud for example; there will be savings but right now it's hard to put a quantified number on it.

Councilor Roberts said all those involved in the Shared Services Committee have put in a lot of time. Going forward, both the Board of Education and Town Council have agreed on what needs to happen and have studied other towns. She thinks the people of the town will be happy with it.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 8-0-0

Councilor Kotkin moved "THAT THE TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES BE SET AT \$56,374,947 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015"  
Seconded by Councilor Martino.

Approved

Councilor Rell said he has concerns with this portion of the budget. He doesn't think the departments should have a target percentage, but rather start off at zero, and let the Council know wants vs. needs. Thinks there are more places we can look for cuts.

Councilor Manousos appreciates what the Board of Education has done, but said there wasn't a reduction in text books which was included in the power point presentation to the public and is deceiving. Text books went up 14% even after you take out Go Math; there was a reduction in the 6% that was originally asked for. Said we should look at the existing network so students can use their own devices and use that savings towards extra tutors or other projects.

Deputy Mayor Barry said that budget discussions started in December—if someone feels there are other areas where savings could have been found, they should participate in the process and speak up then, not when it's being implemented.

Chairperson Montinieri stated he attended almost every budget workshop at the Board of Education. In the past administration the approach was more aggressive and cuts were made that suggested that we hadn't done enough. During that time classroom size expanded, teacher positions were lost, and we weren't able to fund a Security Director. During the discussions that happened over the past 6 months, distinctions were made and there were cuts in the desired increases. Technology in the middle and grammar schools is behind and the amount to get us caught up to other schools that we compete with would require \$200,000-\$300,000 of technology expenditures. Let the public evaluate the Council's record.

Council Kotkin thanked the Board of Education members working with the Council. He said the Council pushed hard and went through the budget line by line. Thinks there are some innovative things staff has done to hold down special education costs and thanked Superintendent Mike Emmett for implementing those.

Councilor Manousos stated that a lot of those savings were opportunistic (diesel, insurance). Supports technology, has kids in the school system, but also has elderly parents in own, his comments on the budget are what he thinks are best for the town.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 5-3-0, Councilors Hemmann, Manousos & Rell voting NO.

Councilor Kotkin moved "THAT THE TOWN COUNCIL ADOPT THE TOWN BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER ON APRIL 6, 2015 AND AS AMENDED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL, IN THE SUM OF \$95,341,863 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015" Seconded by Councilor Martino.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 5-3-0, Councilors Hemmann, Manousos & Rell voting NO.

Approved

Councilor Kotkin moved “THAT THE TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CAPITAL AND NONRECURRING ROAD FUND BE SET AT \$914,050 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015” Seconded by Councilor Martino:

Town Manager Bridges clarified that there are 2 State grants that get added to this amount to make the \$1.5 million.

Councilor Rell asked that if any additional roads may need repair due to the harsh winter and will this amount be sufficient to handle any additional occurrences. Town Manager Bridges said no; this amount is not even sufficient to meet current need.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 8-0-0

Councilor Kotkin moved “THAT THE TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR LIBRARY PURPOSES BE SET AT \$1,928,134 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015” Seconded by Councilor Martino:

Councilor Hemmann asked if this amount includes the libraries potential need for an additional \$5,000. Chairperson Montinieri answered that need is being addressed with some savings from this year’s budget.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 8-0-0

Councilor Kotkin motion “THAT THE TOTAL AMOUNT TO BE RAISED BY TAXES FOR THE TOWN, LIBRARY, SCHOOL AND CAPITAL AND NONRECURRING ROAD FUNDPURPOSES COMBINED BE SET AT \$83,940,234 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015” Seconded by Councilor Martino:

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 5-3-0, Councilors Hemmann, Manousos & Rell voting NO.

Councilor Kotkin motion “THAT THE GENERAL FUND TAX RATE ON ALL REAL AND PERSONAL TAXABLE PROPERTY BE SET AT 37.77 MILLS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015” Seconded by Councilor Martino:

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 5-3-0, Councilors Hemmann, Manousos & Rell voting NO.

Councilor Kotkin motion “THAT THE CAPITAL AND NON RECURRING ROADS FUND TAX RATE ON ALL REAL AND PERSONAL TAXABLE PROPERTY BE SET AT .42 MILLS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015” Seconded by Councilor Martino.

Approved

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted. Motion passed 8-0-0

Mayor Montinieri thanked Finance Director O'Neil, Town Manager Bridges and Superintendent Emmett saying he thinks everyone has done a good job on the 2015-16 Town Budget and the product speaks well of a good process.

#### ADJOURNMENT

At 7:10 p.m., Councilor Roberts moved "TO ADJOURN THE MEETING" seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano  
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council  
June 1, 2015